

LETTERS



SUGAR AND PORTION REDUCTION BY FOOD INDUSTRY

Repeating the success of the salt reduction programme

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Contrary to the suggestion that voluntary targets for the food industry won't work,^{1 2} evidence shows that the gradual, voluntary approach to reformulation can be successful. Between 2001 and 2011 sodium intake in the UK fell significantly as the result of a national salt reduction programme.³ The programme encouraged reformulation of foods and was supported by a campaign to raise awareness and offer guidance to the public. A reduction in blood pressure and in the incidence of stroke and coronary heart disease has also been attributed to the programme.⁴ The programme was voluntary but open, accountable, and highly managed.

Public Health England is confident that industry will rise to the challenge of reducing sugar in its products in a similar way. All sectors of the food industry will be expected to engage with the sugar reduction programme including retailers, manufacturers, and the out of home sector (for example, restaurants, takeaways, and cafes). Some companies have already done a lot of work in this area. Public Health England will remain independent, will be driven by the evidence, and will ensure scrutiny by consulting with non-government organisations and others.

To ensure that the achievement matches expectations, Public Health England will publish interim reports on progress every

six months. They will include details of companies that are engaging with the organisation and the programme as a whole. Detailed and consistent data will be published, allowing progress by sector, top selling products, and companies to be easily and comparably checked. This programme is a high priority for Public Health England, which will put maximum effort into enabling its success. If there has not been sufficient progress by 2020, the government will decide whether levers, such as legislation, are required.

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: <http://www.bmj.com/content/355/bmj.i5348/rr-0>.

- 1 Spencer N, Rajmil L. Voluntary targets for food companies will not end childhood obesity. *BMJ* 2016;355:i6068.
- 2 Iacobucci G. Government urges food industry to cut 20% of sugar and reduce portion sizes. *BMJ* 2016;355:i5348. doi:10.1136/bmj.i5348 pmid:27697920.
- 3 Department of Health. Report on dietary sodium intakes 2012. 2012 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/report-on-dietary-sodium-intakes>
- 4 He FJ, Pombo-Rodrigues S, Macgregor GA. Salt reduction in England from 2003 to 2011: its relationship to blood pressure, stroke and ischaemic heart disease mortality. *BMJ Open* 2014;4:e004549. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2013-004549. pmid:24732242.

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